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SUBJECT: BRV REITERATES THERE'S NO FARC IN VENEZUELA

Classified By: Political Counselor Francisco Fernandez  
for Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) According to press reports, FARC Supreme leader Alfonso Cano AKA Guillermo Leon Saenz inadvertently revealed the names of seven senior FARC operatives in Venezuela in a communique that vowed a new offensive against Colombian police and military units following setbacks during 2008. Cano used the communique, excerpts of which were published in a regional Venezuelan paper January 3, to issue marching orders to various FARC leaders to conduct operations in specific geographic areas. Acknowledging that good relations with Venezuela "were fundamental," and that Bertulfo, Timochenko, Ivan Marquez, Rodrigo Granda, Solis Almeyda, Martin Villa and Hermes Aguilera were assigned that task. (Note: The May 2008 video of Timochenko announcing FARC Supreme Leader Manuel Marulanda's death had already raised much speculation that he was inside of Venezuela because of the unique flora in the background. End Note.)

¶2. (SBU) Although not published in any leading Venezuelan daily, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was swift to disavow any knowledge of FARC leaders residing in Venezuela. During an January 4 press conference, Minister of Information and Communications, Jesse Chacon denied any "formal knowledge" that members of the FARC Secretariat or High Command were in Venezuela. (Note: In December 2004 FARC "Foreign Minister" Rodrigo Granda was snatched off the streets of Caracas by Colombian operatives. End Note.) Chacon vowed that Venezuela would act "within the letter of the law" and assured that any FARC member would be "detained" and the Colombian government "informed," stressing that President Hugo Chavez's greatest desire was peace in Colombia.

¶3. (C) Contacts in the Colombian embassy in Caracas told PolOff that their information indicated at least seven senior commander or Secretariat members are operating in Venezuela. Secretariat member and commander of the Northwest and Caribbean blocks, Granda, AKA Ivan Marquez, is in the La Perija region of Zulia state. In that same region are FARC "Radio Resistance" director Jesus Santrich, Front 41 combat commander Aldemar Altamiranda, AKA Gilberto de Jesus Giraldo Davis, and FARC international relations spokesman Marcos Calarca, AKA Luis Alberto Aban Urbano. FARC central command member Solis Almeyda, AKA Abelardo Caicedo, is retired in the Venezuelan town of Machiques. Further south FARC Secretariat member Timochenko, AKA Rodrigo Londono Echeverry, and the commander of Front 35 were operating out of an old National Guard base near the city of San Cristobal, in Tachira state. In Apure, Granobles AKA German Briceno, the brother of FARC Secretariat member Mono Jojoy, AKA Jorge Briceno, commands Front 10. FARC "Foreign Minister" Rodrigo Granda lives in the Caracas neighborhood of California and travels regularly to Cuba. The Colombians are convinced that in order to

burnish his image as a peace maker, Chavez is trying to arrange the release of six FARC hostages inside of Venezuelan territory prior to the February 15 amendment vote allowing unlimited re-election.

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